

The Village

Fort Vancouver National Historic Site
National Park Service
Vancouver National Historic Reserve



The village was home for the workers of the Hudson's Bay Company stationed at Fort Vancouver. It was a crowded, lively place during seasons when the fur brigades returned and its population exceeded 600 people. All helped Fort Vancouver become a successful and expansive post. The workers of the village were trappers, blacksmiths, coopers, carpenters, tinsmiths, dairymen, millwrights, and farm laborers. Their wives and children were integral to the operation as well. Many accompanied their husbands or fathers on brigade, spending most of the year cleaning skins, cooking, making clothing, and other essential activities. Others stayed in the village, and worked in the fields or salted and packed salmon.

There were many different types of people living in the village. Only a few were from Europe, coming mainly from England and Scotland. Many were Canadian. There was a large group of Hawaiians, and people from over 30 different Native American groups whose homelands spanned the continent. As was common across the lands of the fur trade, there were also *Metis*, those of mixed Native and European heritage. If you had visited the village in the middle of the 19th century, you would

certainly have heard a medley of languages. Very few people spoke English at Fort Vancouver. You could have listened for Hawaiian, French, Gaelic, and a great variety of Native American languages and dialects. Almost everyone adopted Chinook Jargon to communicate with each other. Since the men of the village came from diverse backgrounds, and the majority of women were from local tribes, often Jargon was the language families used in their homes as well as for business and socializing outside.

A large entrance gate separated the Village from the fort proper. The houses were arrayed along broad lanes, and scattered in between. Most were small since employees had to build them themselves. Some had an attached shed for extra storage and work space, or a garden to supplement the Company rations men received. Though all in the Village worked long hours for little pay, historical records and archaeology give a sense of a colorful, generally harmonious settlement. After work, families and neighbors may have gathered at communal fires to cook their supper. Doubtless there was singing, and maybe dancing or games of skill. A good place to call home.

Meriwether Lewis foreshadowed the Hudson's Bay Company's decision to establish Fort Vancouver here, describing it as "...the only desirable situation for a settlement on the western side of the Rocky Mountains."

Estimated Population of Towns in the West, c.1840		
Yerba Buena (San Francisco, CA)		170
Portland, OR	not yet established	
Fort Vancouver's Village		600
Seattle, WA	not yet established	
Vancouver, BC	not yet established	
New Archangel (Sitka, AK)		850

Painting by Diana Bonin

Archaeology at the Heart of the Village



The male form on this argillite tobacco pipe bowl is thought to have a flattened head, common to the Chinook peoples, as well as facial tattooing similar to that of Native Hawaiians.



Incised teeth, like this beaver tooth, were used by Native Americans in gambling games.

People of the Village

American, English, French-Canadian, Hawaiian, Irish, Métis, Portuguese, Scottish (including Shetland and Orkney Islanders)

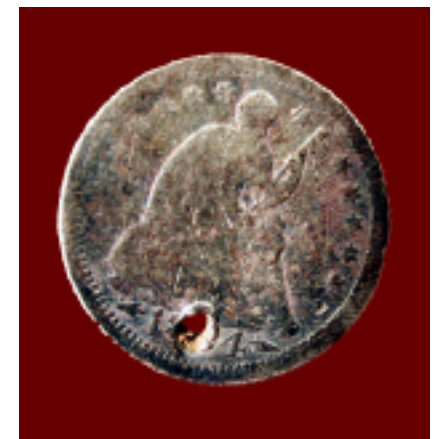
Native American tribes from across the continent, including: Cascades, Californian, Carrier, Cayuse, Chaudières, Chehalis, Chinook, Clallam, Cowichan, Cowlitz, Delaware, Grande Dalles, Haida, Iroquois, Kalapuya, Kalama, Kathlamet, Kholtil, Klickitat, Mollala, Mowatwos, Nez Perce, Nipissing, Nisqually, Okanagan, Pend d'Oreille, Rogue, Shasta, Snake, Snohomish, Spokane, Stikine, Tillamook, Tsnoomus, Umpqua, Walla Walla



Fort Vancouver National Historic Site is the premier historical archaeological site in the Pacific Northwest. Archaeology has yielded a wealth of information about its rich past. For information, please contact the Cultural Resources Division at (360) 696-7659 ext. 17 or visit www.nps.gov/fova



This polychrome plate, found at one of the worker's houses, characterizes the diverse, often colorful tastes of the village inhabitants as compared to those living inside the fort walls.



The people of the Village often adapted trade goods and currency in creative ways, like this American half dime that was perforated to be used as decoration on clothing or jewelry.